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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [KJUS](#)
SUBJECT: AL-MUTLAQ DISQUALIFICATION IS SALT IN THE WOUND
FOR DIYALA'S SUNNIS

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[1](#)B. (B) 10 BAGHDAD 61

Classified By: OPA DIRECTOR GRETA HOLTZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Diyala provincial leaders have expressed concern that disqualification of Sunni MP Saleh Mutlaq and other party candidates due to de-Baathification procedures could adversely effect Diyala's security situation and create more fertile grounds for insurgents to co-opt members of the Sunni community in the run-up to the elections. This recent unease adds to the ongoing perception of Diyala's Sunni leaders that the central government and a perceived Shi'a-biased Iraqi Police (IP) force) with an assist from Iranian-backed groups) is trying to shape the elections. Some contacts also believe the various IP may try to intimidate Sunni voters from entering the polls on Election Day. Despite these concerns, and reports of candidate and voter intimidation and bribes, PRT interlocutors overwhelmingly predict that voter turn-out in Diyala will be similar to the fifty percent turn-out of the January 2009 provincial elections. They also dispute the idea that large numbers of Sunnis will abstain from the voting process. (NOTE: Reporting for this cable was gathered before disqualification of some 500 candidates was publicized. END NOTE.) END SUMMARY.
PROVINCIAL LEADERS CONCERNED ABOUT CANDIDATE DISQUALIFICATIONS

[1](#)2. (C) Provincial leaders in Diyala have expressed concerns over recent news that Saleh Mutlaq MP and other party candidates may be barred from running in the upcoming parliamentary elections due to de-Baathification procedures. (NOTE: Reporting for this cable was gathered before media accounts made public that some 500 candidates would be disqualified for being subject to de-Ba'athification provisions of the Accountability and Justice law. END NOTE.) In an 11 January meeting with the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense for the Middle East, Dr. Colin Kahl, Diyala Operations Center Commander Major General Tariq Abd Al Wahab Jasim Mahdi Al-Azzawi said the proposed disqualification, even if not actually implemented, was "damaging his battle space." He asserted the mere recommendation of disqualification paints the affected candidates as "Baathists" in the eyes of Iraqi voters and is encouraging Sunni perceptions of discrimination in Diyala. The Governor, Abd al-Nasr al-Muntsir Billah (Iraqi Islamic Party) IIP/Tawafuq), stated that he doesn't like Mutluq and believes he is a Baathist, but that the current process to disqualify him appears undemocratic and biased. The Governorate Elections Officer (GEO), Amer Mujiid, opined to PRTOffs that it was imperative that the GOI and IHEC manage this issue with transparency so as not to undermine the legitimacy of the elections process with Sunni voters in Diyala. There also appear to be rumors circulating in Diyala that there was tacit USG support for the proposed disqualification, with Provincial Council members and the DOC commander asking whether the USG had any involvement with the issue.

13. (C) Eight members of the Diyala Provincial Council from both the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue (IFND-Mutlaq's party, in the new Iraqiyya Alliance) and the Iraqi National Movement (INM- Ayad Allawi's new party) appeared cautiously optimistic that any disqualification could be successfully appealed. (Note: Members were confused over whether the ban was already executed). PC member Amer Thamir Mustafa (INM) echoed other members when he noted that, even though the Iraqiyya Alliance is secular and represents both Shi'a and QIraqiyya Alliance is secular and represents both Shi'a and Sunni, he believes the proposed disqualification is representative of continued attempts by a sectarian biased government) and Iran - to specifically target Sunni leaders. The Governor suggested the disqualification raises questions in Diyala over whether Sunnis from IFND may now face targeted arrest warrants in the same manner that Tawafuq has. Moreover, the PC members, the DOC commander, and the Governor voiced concerns that this proposed disqualification could create more fertile grounds for insurgents to co-opt members of the Sunni community and also lead to additional violence in the run-up to the elections. Diyala's Chief Judge, Fa'iq Hattab Dahamad al-Rubai also said that the disqualification issue would have an adverse affect on the security situation in Diyala.

ONGOING CONCERNS OF BIASED IRAQI POLICE INTERFERENCE

14. (C) The recent controversy over a possible ban of Sunni party candidates under de-Baathification procedures adds to ongoing concerns about Sunni disenfranchisement in Diyala. As previously reported, Sunni leaders in Diyala believe that they are being purposefully targeted) by both central government authorities and Iranian-backed special groups -

for arrest and assassination to help shape the playing field for the upcoming elections (Reftel A). Moreover, local Sunni leaders in Diyala believe that the Shi'a dominated Iraqi Police (IP) are biased and will attempt to influence the elections. Assertions of sectarian bias among the Iraqi Police are not only heard from Sunnis; no less than Diyala's Chief Judge Fa'iq (Shi'a) recently lamented this bias to PRTOffs.

15. (C) PC member Fakhri Khalf Shihab (IIP) and Dr. Ahmed Hamed Al Baka (Iraqi National Alliance/National Reform Trend) and others have voiced concerns that Sunni citizens may be discouraged from entering the polling sites by police intimidation before or on the day of the elections. The GEO, Amer Mujjid, has said that he thinks it likely that some IP will be involved with efforts to influence the outcome of the vote in certain parts of Diyala, including Muqdadiah. (Reftel B) Reports that a list of approximately 50 Sunni and moderate Shi'a IP would be fired also recently heightened concerns in Diyala that sectarian-biased IP were being pre-positioned to influence the elections. While Hazim Serraj, representative for the Red Crescent and Prime Minister (PM) in Diyala, insisted to PRTOffs that this list existed, he said it was withdrawn at the behest of the PM, and the Diyala Provincial Director of Police said the Ministry of Interior had suspended the order, it remains a lingering concern among Sunni leaders in Diyala.

CANDIDATE INTIMIDATION AND FRAUD

16. (C) Beyond the ongoing concerns of Sunni disenfranchisement, PRT interlocutors have provided some initial reports of candidate intimidation and political parties using bribes to secure votes. On January 5th, the GEO reported to PRTOffs that PC member Shayma Muhammad Amin Mahmud decided to remove her name from the Tawafuq List due to intimidation. He reported she felt threatened to run with Tawafuq after a swath of trees was cut down on her family's orchard. (Note: Contacts state that cutting down trees is understood as both an insult and threat of future violence among the local community). Shayma (Sunni) successfully ran as an Iraqi National List (Allawi's previous party) candidate during the Provincial Council elections, but she and others

have indicated increasing disagreements with their party the past few months. The GEO alluded to the fact that the threat may have been politically motivated by those within her own party in an effort to stop her jumping ship to Tawafuq for the upcoming national elections. (Comment: If this is correct, then the threat appears to have worked as Shayma now reports she is once again aligned with Allawi. End Comment).

17. (C) In addition to the report of candidate intimidation, multiple PRT contacts have noted that political parties are using money and other bribes to convince citizens to vote for particular parties and candidates. In one example, local Tribal Support Council (Shi'a) members in Khalis told PRTOffs that these types of bribes were commonplace - noting that people were being given items such as blankets and heaters in addition to money. In another, a local school teacher mentioned that a female candidate for IIP was providing funds to widows in the Sunni-dominated area of Udaim. There are also reports of some of these "perks" being provided by Iranian-backed agents to support the Shi'a-led INA in places such as Abu Sayda and Khalis, among others. Beyond these specific bribes, some Sunni leaders also view recent efforts by the central government to provide jobs and host Qby the central government to provide jobs and host reconciliation efforts in Diyala as little more than bribes to influence voters to support PM Maliki.

WILL THE PEOPLE OF DIYALA VOTE?

18. (C) Many PRT interlocutors, both Shi'a and Sunni have commented over the past few months that people in Diyala do not feel that the GOI is taking care of their needs and are becoming disillusioned with the democratic process. Political party leaders in Diyala from Da'wa (State of Law Alliance), the INM (INA) , and the National Reform Trend (INA), among others, have also bemoaned that the national level party structure forced candidates onto the Diyala lists who do not truly represent the people of Diyala. Questioned whether these dynamics will result in voters staying away from the polls, however, the overwhelming response is that people will vote in similar numbers to the previous Provincial Council elections. From local Shi'a service managers in Abu Sayda, Muqdadiah to the Assistant Governor for Administrative Affairs, Hafith Abdul Azziz Juma'a (IIP) most contacts predict a 50 percent turn-out (Note: Voter turn-out in Diyala in the January 2009 national elections was approximately 50 percent). The GEO recently optimistically proclaimed that he believes the turn-out will be closer to 60 to 70 percent.

19. (C) COMMENT. The disqualification of MP Mutlaq is likely to be an additional irritant to the current situation in Diyala where Sunnis believe they are being targeted and discriminated against for political gain or sectarian bias. Moreover, as perceptions of bias grow, fed for example by media reports about 500 candidates being disqualified, many of them Sunnis, Sunni disenchantment with the electoral process is likely to increase. If current reports of possible high-level political intervention to address de-Ba'atification controversy prove true, this disenchantment can be contained and risks of any election boycott diminished. END COMMENT.
HILL